

Fall 8-15-2001

## ENG 3099G-099: Myth and Culture (Honors)

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English 3099G, Section 099 (Fall 2001)

## *Myth and Culture, honors*

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Office Hours: MWF 10-11, TuTh 2-3 and by appt.

TuTh 12:30 - 1:45  
Coleman 3150 (307)

### **Course Description**

The catalog describes this course as follows: Through comparative analysis of myths from selected cultural traditions, the course will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding. You will find, however, as you talk to your peers, that each instructor teaches this course a bit differently, with different texts and emphases. So... what sets this section apart?

In terms of format, I like to see a lively class. I will do whatever I can to keep you awake and involved and interested. Don't be surprised to see a lot of small group interaction and a variety of activities. I do not want to hear myself talk 150 minutes a week and I doubt you do either.

Because this is an honors class, I make certain assumptions: among these are that you are self-motivated, that you know how to use the library, and that I can trust you enough not to have to give quizzes. There will be times when the subject matter for the course will be based on your outside research. We will not limit ourselves to the text, and we will not always all be reading the same thing.

### **Course Objectives**

By the end of the semester, I expect you to know...

- what myths are and how they function
- what some of the beliefs and customs of ancient peoples, especially the Hindus, Greeks, Navajos, and Mayans are
- what some of the myths of the Hindus, Tibetan Buddhists, Sumerians, Ancient Greeks, Native North Americans, and Mayans are
- the significance of similarities and differences among cultural myths and beliefs
- that all people have myths, whether they know it or not

With this knowledge, I expect you to be able to...

- break down cultural misunderstandings and barriers
- recognize your own prejudices
- recognize similarities among cultures
- be able to read a myth from any culture and draw some tentative conclusions about that culture
- recognize and be able to analyze your own culture and mythology
- learn different ways of teaching about cultures and texts
- enjoy

### **Texts**

Dundes, *Sacred Narrative*  
 Ferrucci, *Life of God*  
 Lhalungpa, *Life of Milarepa*  
 Ovid, *Metamorphoses*  
 Tedlock, *Popol Vuh*  
 Zolbrod, *Diné Bahane'*

*There is a lot of reading in this course, some selections easier than others. Thus, discipline will be rewarded, procrastination will get you into trouble. You will enjoy most of the selections, I hope; the issues they deal with are relevant in our culture today, even if the names are strange.*

### **Films**

*Mahabharata*  
*Popol Vuh*

*Movies do not mean a day off. Be an active viewer: think about what you see and hear.*

### **Grade Breakdown:**

|                    |                    |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| Response Journal   | 225 points         |
| Group Presentation | 125 points         |
| Reflective Essay   | 150 points         |
| Paper/Presentation | 250 points         |
| Class Myth         | 100 points         |
| Participation      | 150 points         |
| <b>Total</b>       | <b>1000 points</b> |

### **Course Grade Calculator:**

|                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| 901-1000 points | A |
| 801-900 points  | B |
| 701-800 points  | C |
| 601-700 points  | D |
| 0-600 points    | F |

### **Words of Advice on Grades**

*Adequate, Average work will earn you a 'C' in this course. If you merely go through the motions, but do so with a certain amount of skill, you are an average (i.e. 'C') student. If you merely go through the motions without much skill, you may very well earn a 'D'; missing deadlines consistently or racking up lots of absences may also lead to a 'D'. Good work, i.e. extra effort and good quality product will earn you a 'B.' Excellent work, i.e. going above and beyond the requirements for assignments, using both skill and creativity, should earn you an 'A.' Keep in mind that doing an assignment is no guarantee of an 'A' or 'B'—you must also do it well. If you are shooting for a particular grade in this course, I advise that you come see me early so we can discuss how you might best achieve that grade. I do not care what grade you need; I will do whatever I can to help you earn the grade you want.*

### **Students with Disabilities**

*If you have a documented disability and wish to discuss academic accommodations, please contact the Office of disability Services at 581-6583 (9<sup>th</sup> St. Hall).*

### **Electronic Writing Portfolio**

*If you are a sophomore or transfer student who needs a paper from this class for your Electronic Writing Portfolio, please see me for guidelines*

### **English Department Policy on Plagiarism**

*Any teacher who discovers an act of plagiarism—"the appropriation of the language, ideas, and/or thoughts of another author, and representation of them as one's original work" (Random House Dictionary of the English Language)—has the right and the responsibility to impose upon the guilty student an appropriate penalty, up to and including immediate assignment of a grade of F for the course, and to report the incident to the Judicial Affairs Office.*

Assignment Summary (More detailed assignment sheets forthcoming)

**Group Presentation**

Four times during the semester, there will be a group presentation on a culture: Tibetan (Sept 13), Hindu (Oct 2), Mayan (Oct 25), and Navajo (Nov 6). Insofar as possible, I will try to accommodate your preferences in assigning groups. The purpose of the presentations is to give the class a background on the cultures whose myth we will be studying.

**Journal**

Each week during the semester, you will be expected to write 500 words in a response journal, documenting what you think about the reading, films, discussions. I will pick these up periodically for evaluation purposes; grades will be based not so much on grammar and style, but on the thought and reflection displayed in the writing. You may start with what you like and don't like about a particular story or what you find strange, but then take the discussion deeper, trying to interpret the meaning and function of the story, comparing it to other things we read or to theoretical perspectives.

**Thematic Essay**

Your major project this semester will entail reading an issue of the journal *Parabola* and writing a paper on the theme of the issue you have chosen. For example, your issue might be "Heroes" or "Gender." You would then read the issue, write at least 1000 words of response on what you read, and then craft a paper that deals with your theme in the various myths that we have read up to that time. You may also do further outside reading. I will also expect you to act as a class resource on that theme for the rest of the class. If you were studying the issue of *Parabola* on gender, for example, I'd expect you to contribute to class discussion on the role of gender and gender differences in the various cultures and myths that we study.

I will ask you to make a choice on theme on Tuesday, September 4. Your response to the themed issue is due October 4, and the paper itself will be due on October 23. I will return the paper with comments on October 30, and you will have the opportunity to revise and resubmit the essay by November 6. We will discuss your essays and conclusions about these themes in class during the last 2 weeks.

**Reflective Essay**

On December 4, you will hand in an essay that demonstrates what you think about the impact that myth has on your own life and the impact you perceive it to have on others. There will be no final in this class, so this assignment and the class storytelling session are meant to sum up and draw some conclusions from what you have learned. Reading the *Life of God* and the quotations on the syllabus will help you find a focus your essay.

**Class Myth**

On Monday, December 10 (or a different time, if we can arrange it), we will assemble and create our own myths and stories. This is a mandatory assignment, but a creative one, in which, now that you all will have a good sense of what myth is, you will become the mythtellers!

**Questions??**

If I've forgotten something or you have questions at any time, please feel free to drop by my office (3871 Coleman)

## SYLLABUS

"Myths are other people's religion." (Sam Keen)

**Tu Aug 21 Introduction**  
**Forms of Oral Narrative**

**Th Aug 23 What Is Myth?**  
**Read: Alan Dundes' Introduction to Sacred Narrative; Lauri Honko, "The Problem of Defining Myth"; William Bascom, "Forms of Folklore." These are in Sacred Narrative, pp. 1-3, 5-29, 41-52.**  
**Choose culture groups**  
**Introduction to Roman Culture**

"The real point of myth is not to give an objective world picture; what is expressed in it, rather, is how we human beings understand ourselves in the world."  
 (Rudolf Bultmann, German theologian)

**Tu Aug 28 Metamorphoses, Book 1**  
**Th Aug 30 Metamorphoses, Books 2 and 3**

"Myth embodies the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be expressed in words"  
 (Ananda Coomaraswamy, Indian philosopher)

**Tu Sep 4 Metamorphoses, Books 4-6**  
**Choose issue of Parabola for paper**  
**Th Sep 6 Metamorphoses, Books 7 and 8**

"Myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the supernatural) into the World. Myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a 'true story,' because it deals with *realities*. The cosmogonic myth is 'true' because the existence of the World is there to prove it."  
 (Mircea Eliade, Myth scholar)

**Tu Sep 11 Metamorphoses, Books 9-11**  
**Th Sep 13 Presentation on Tibetan Culture**  
**Journal for weeks 1-4 due**

"Myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates the inner meaning of the universe and of human life."  
 (Alan Watts, British expositor of Buddhism to the West)

**Tu Sep 18 Life of Milarepa, pp. 9-70**  
**Th Sep 20 Life of Milarepa, pp. 71-107**

"Mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends that are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true."  
 (Robert Graves, British poet and myth scholar)

**Tu Sep 25 Life of Milarepa, pp. 108-197**  
**Th Sep 27 Reading/Research Day—no formal class meeting**

*"The friend of wisdom is the friend of myth."  
(Aristotle, Greek philosopher)*

**Tu Oct 2 Presentation on Hinduism**  
**Th Oct 4 Mahabharata (film)**  
**Read Raffaele Pettazzoni, "The Truth of Myth,"**  
**Sacred Narrative, pp. 98-109**  
**Written response to Parabola issue due**

*"Myth gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he does understand the universe."  
(Claude Levi-Strauss, French anthropologist)*

**Tu Oct 9 Mahabharata (film)**  
**Read Th. Van Baaren, "The Flexibility of Myth,"**  
**Sacred Narrative, pp. 217-224**  
**Th Oct 11 Mahabharata (film)**  
**Read Eric Dardel, "The Mythic," Sacred Narrative, pp. 225-243**  
**Journal for weeks 5-8 due**

*"Myths are the daydreaming of the human race."  
(Sigmund Freud, Father of Psychoanalysis)*

**Tu Oct 16 Mahabharata (film)**  
**Th Oct 18 Mahabharata (film)**

*"These things never happened, yet they always are."  
(Saloustios, 4<sup>th</sup> century Greek scholar)*

**Tu Oct 23 Discussion of Mahabharata**  
**Draft of paper due**  
**Th Oct 25 Mayan Presentation**  
**Read Popol Vuh, Parts 1 and 2**

*"There is mythology now as there was in the time of Homer, only we do not perceive it. Mythology, in the highest sense, is the power exercised by language on thought in every possible sphere of mental activity."  
(F. Max Müller, Linguist and scholar of myth)*

**Tu Oct 30 Popol Vuh, part 3**  
**Th Nov 1 Popol Vuh (film)**

"Myth explains the why and how of here and now"  
(Th. P. Van Baaren, Professor of Science and Religion)

Tu Nov 6 **Presentation on Navajo Culture**  
Dine Bahane, *Part 1*  
**Revised paper due**  
Th Nov 8 Dine Bahane, *Part 2*

"Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present."  
(Carlos Fuentes, Mexican author)

Tu Nov 13 Dine Bahane, *Part 3*  
Th Nov 15 Dine Bahane, *Part 4*  
**Response Journal for weeks 9-13 due**

"Myths are the agents of stability, fictions the agents of change."  
(Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending*)

\*\*\* Thanksgiving Break \*\*\*  
\*\*\* Thanksgiving Break \*\*\*

"Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation into life and death."  
(Joseph Campbell, Myth Scholar)

Tu Nov 27 Life of God, pp. 5-129  
Th Nov 29 Life of God, pp. 133-196

"Myth is neither conscious poetry nor valid science, but the common root and raw material of both."  
(George Santayana, Philosopher)

Tu Dec 4 Life of God, pp. 196-273  
**Reflective Paper due**  
Th Dec 6 Life of God, pp. 277-281  
**Journal for weeks 14 and 15 due**

"To create a myth, that is to say, to venture behind the reality of the sense to find a superior reality, is the most manifest sign of the greatness of the human soul and the proof of its capacity for infinite growth and development."  
(Louis-Auguste Sabatier, French Protestant Theologian)

M Dec 10, 12:30 PM **Class Myth**